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A Tentative Categorisation of Various Types of Work Flexibility

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Abstract: The article provides a more detailed discussion of a tentative categorisation of various types of work flexibility in Slovenia on the basis of the survey from the international Households, Work and Flexibility project. It shows that there are statistically significant differences between selected flexibility categories in the ('objective') characteristics related to work, but practically no significant differences in the ('subjective') opinions on possible work/family conflicts or agreements about various household issues. In comparison with the candidate countries, the Netherlands, Sweden and the UK reveal a much higher share of atypical forms of employment, but also greater satisfaction with various aspects of work. These large differences are influenced not only by institutional and policy choices, but also by general factors such as the level of development, economic structure, lifestyles and preferences. The results arising out of the 'supply side' of work show that flexible forms of employment can be both more or less favourable than typical, full-time, permanent employment with a regular schedule and one economic activity. The answer to this depends both on objective and subjective criteria. Such empirical research can be an important element in contributing to the process of building a social consensus around how to balance the benefits and costs of flexible forms for all stakeholders.

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Introduction

The article attempts to discuss a provisional categorisation of the survey respondents in the Households, Work and Flexibility project (HWF) in different categories of flexibility. The complex problem of flexibility of work has come to assume major economic, social and political importance. As Beck pointed out [2000], the risk regime prevails in every field, economy, society and polity, meaning that the future of work will involve more than one direction of development, within and across a number of different dimensions. These trends are recognised by several international organisations, though with a somewhat different emphasis. In its evaluation of the labour market performance and the OECD Jobs Strategy, the OECD finds that „high and persistent unemployment remains a major problem, with a significant role played by 'atypical forms' of employment. Part-time work has made a positive contribution in most countries, but sometimes it is a second-best choice" [OECD 1999].

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The ILO states in its World Employment Report that "recent years have seen a significant growth of part-time or temporary contracts, of self-employment and of informal sector employment in developing countries. Flexible work arrangements can result in pressure to create low-skill jobs, and those accepting them may well receive less training. Similarly, those entering self-employment and informal sector work may lack basic skills and never be able to acquire them. The overall result can be a general downgrading of the skill structure of the labour force" [ILO 1998].

All these challenges will have to be addressed at three levels: the personal (worker-centred), activity (company-centred) and society levels. There is a much greater chance of a better outcome if the co-ordination of these different perspectives is achieved in a continued social dialogue rather than through the random actions of the participating agents. The statistical data on atypical forms of employment, as well as survey responses, can be interpreted as outcomes of the interactions at all three levels in different countries. However, in this article, as in the HWF project, some light can be shed on a rather detailed study of only one aspect of the overall picture, i.e. on the personal and household side.

Still, a better understanding of a partial aspect can be important in searching for better overall solutions. It is unsatisfactory to start from the black-and-white distinction that standard forms are by nature superior to flexible forms of employment or vice versa, depending on the ideological position or diverse interests of different sides involved in the policy debate. The position in this article follows the view of Sicherl and Remec [2002] that the issue of whether flexible forms of employment are good or bad jobs from the personal/household perspective is an empirical question. A similar position was taken by McGovern, Smeaton and Hill [2002] and Kalleberg, Reskin and Hudson [2000]. The final answer depends both on objective and subjective criteria, but the empirical investigation here will attempt to study what conclusions can be arrived at by looking at the 'objective' conditions of different forms of employment.

The article first presents in greater detail the results and conclusions of the grouping of the Slovenian survey respondents into selected major flexibility groups. For the Slovenian case a set of hypotheses was tested, which relate to the working assumption that some flexible forms of employment are more and others are less favourable as jobs than the standard, full-time, permanent employment with a regular schedule and one economic activity. In other words, grouping the economically active respondents into three major categories, the null hypothesis was tested that there were no statistically significant differences for the three groups with respect to variables like selected work characteristics, source of income, satisfaction with various aspects of work, and possible work/family conflicts.

Owing to the lack of space and the complexity of the analysis it is not feasible to analyse the situation in other participating countries in the same manner. As a consequence, the comparative analysis shows only the structure of respondents in the selected eight and/or three categories, the average number of activities and hours of work in the main activity for these categories, and the subjective satisfac-

tion with various aspects of work. In addition, the atypical forms of employment are also compared using secondary sources. A brief comparison of the results for the Czech Republic and Slovenia is followed by conclusions.

The grouping of Slovenian survey respondents into major flexibility groups

A possible approach to an operational definition of flexibility is that flexibility is contrasted to a standard form of arrangements. The first of the three major categories of employment will be formed out of those people permanently employed full-time, with a regular working schedule and only one economic activity. This category will be labelled 'standard pattern of employment'. This means that the rest of the cases could be labelled as flexible forms of employment.

In the Analysis of the Survey for Slovenia,¹ several subdivisions of flexible (non-standard) employment forms are used. The first set of subdivisions breaks down these forms into seven subcategories. There are advantages in doing so, but in many cases it is difficult to draw statistically significant conclusions because of the small number of cases in some of these subcategories. Therefore, the flexible (non-standard) employment forms are then combined into two major groups: 'flexible employment group A' and 'flexible employment group B'.

Flexible employment group A encompasses flexible categories of those employed full-time with more than one economic activity or with the possibility of flexitime, the self-employed, students with additional jobs, and retired people with additional jobs. This approximation is meant to indicate probable 'voluntary' or 'desirable' forms of flexibility. Flexible employment group B includes those who work shift-work, those who work irregular hours, those working with fixed contracts, part-time employment, casual workers, and those employed but laid off. In a certain way, these could be referred to as 'involuntary' or 'undesirable' forms of flexibility. Of course, without knowing the subjective evaluations of the persons involved it is impossible to be certain whether the breakdown into such categories used in this process (see tables 1 and 2) is appropriate or not. There is a wide range of situations in which some forms of flexibility are very desirable from the point of view of the respondent, while some other forms of flexibility might be imposed on him/her as unfavourable conditions, which he/she has to accept to get the job.

In the empirical work, this categorisation into three groups – flexible employment group A, flexible employment group B and standard employment group C – provides interesting results in the case of Slovenia. The preliminary results may be helpful in searching for a more precise, yet pragmatic definition of flexibility at this level of analysis. Several interesting statistically significant differences between the

¹ The Analysis of the Survey for Slovenia is available in Sicherl and Remec [2002], and a slightly revised version is available in Research Report #3, containing Country Survey Reports on the participating countries [Wallace 2003].

Table 1. Flexibility grouping into eight categories

Category	Frequency	Percent (%)
1. Full-time employment, more activities, flexitime	83	14.4
2. Full-time employment, shift and irregular work	115	19.9
3. Part-time employment	7	1.2
4. Fixed contract	60	10.4
5. Self-employed	41	7.1
6. Students and retired people with one or more activities	64	11.1
7. Others	27	4.7
8. Employed full-time, regular schedule, one activity	181	31.3
	n=578	

three groups that were established from the Slovenian survey data can provide new tentative hypotheses.

The results pertain to a subset of respondents, who answered that they had had one or more economic activities during the previous twelve months and could by this criterion be considered economically active. In the survey it seems that a number of respondents were reluctant to answer the questions about their additional kinds of work and additional income, so that some of the respective information might be less reliable. Therefore, here we are dealing mainly with a subset of less than 600 economically active respondents who provided the necessary information. One of the possible subdivisions of this set – into eight flexibility categories in the first round, and into the three above-mentioned categories in the second round – is shown in tables 1 and 2.

The major criterion in the categorisation is the employment status of the respondent, which is then combined with some other characteristics of flexibility. As mentioned, the emphasis here is on the 'objective' elements of work status and flexibility, which may or may not correspond to the subjective evaluation of the respondents with respect to these characteristics.² Therefore, the approach taken here has the advantage that such 'objective' elements can be compared for different social groups or different countries. However, it should obviously not be considered

² For instance, it is considered here that working in shifts or on an irregular schedule is a negative element of work; while in a survey by the Statistical Office of Slovenia a rather large number of those working in shifts expressed their satisfaction with such a position. Of course, it is difficult to disentangle whether, in answering that question, they were satisfied that they had a job or whether they were satisfied with the shift arrangement as such.

Table 2. Flexibility grouping into three categories

Category	Frequency	Percent (%)
Flexibility group A (1+5+6)	188	32.5
Flexibility group B (2+3+4+7)	209	36.2
Standard employment group C (8)	181	31.1
	n=578	

Source: Sicerl [2003: 50]

as a statement of the difficulty or satisfaction with a particular position with respect to a given element of work.

Some of the subdivisions in table 1 are self-explanatory. Part-time employment and fixed-contract (temporary) employment are two categories of flexible work conditions which will be compared here in time and cross-nationally. The same goes for the category of the self-employed. The major dilemma is how, according to their flexibility characteristics, to categorise those who are employed full-time, who comprise about two-thirds of the subset of economically active respondents analysed. As explained above, the first of the three major categories of employment comprises those employed full-time, with a regular working schedule and only one economic activity (standard employment group C). The other two categories of those employed full-time are then considered as categories of flexible employment, distinct from the above-mentioned standard employment category, as they exhibit some 'positive' or 'negative' elements of flexibility in their work situation. Category 1 in table 1 comprises those employed full-time that have two or more economic activities or are employed full-time and have the advantage of flexitime privileges, i.e. they can start or finish their working hours in a flexible arrangement. In category 2 in the table, those with some 'negative' characteristics of work flexibility, such as shift and irregular work schedule, are included. These two categories will be the backbone of the subdivision of those with some flexibility characteristics (as distinct from the standard employment category) into flexibility group A and flexibility group B.

The grouping of respondents into the three categories presented in table 2 is obtained from the eight categories in table 1 in the following way. Standard employment group C is a category by itself to be compared with the rest of the respondents, i.e. those with some flexibility characteristics. However, both for policy and for research considerations the latter are subdivided into the two groups used here, which can later be refined and/or amended. Flexibility group A encompasses those with some 'objective' positive characteristics of flexibility, which are in this instance a summation of categories 1, 5 and 6 from table 1. The idea is that, in addition to category 1, as explained above, one could also add to this group the self-em-

ployed, students, and retired people with one or more activities.³ For the self-employed in Slovenia, this position may be considered to be in the majority of cases a voluntary decision aimed at more independence and flexibility in work for those who choose it, rather than a consequence of being laid off and being forced into such a status. This may be very different in some other countries, and thus in international comparisons the self-employed category should be subdivided accordingly.

Flexibility group B comprises four categories from table 1 (adding categories 2, 3, 4 and 7). The most important component is category 2, with shift and irregular work as explained above. Part-time employment, which is rather rare in Slovenia, and fixed-contract (temporary) employment are placed in this flexibility group with negative objective elements on the presumption that in the majority of cases these employees would prefer a firmer commitment on the part of the employers. The group 'others' comprises casual workers, unpaid workers in family businesses, those unemployed with additional jobs, farmers with one economic activity and those who have been laid off. The great majority of those included in the category 'others' have negative elements of flexibility associated with their work position. To sum up, there are no doubt other possible criteria for categorising respondents by various flexibility characteristics. Here an attempt is being made to bring attention to the 'objective' elements of flexibility in order to initiate a discourse on the positive and negative aspects of flexibility arrangements at work. This issue can later also be connected to work-family situations. The most important policy issue with respect to work flexibility as it is viewed here is the question of how to balance the positive and negative aspects of work flexibility on both the employees' and the employers' sides. The analysis of work characteristics, personal and social characteristics, satisfaction and decisions with various aspects of work, possible work/family conflicts and the personal perception of well-being across the three chosen flexibility groups will hopefully initiate further discussion and research on a partial aspect of the important policy issue of work flexibility.

Table 3 presents the percentage distribution for the three flexibility groups by some elements of work characteristics. The number of activities in the last twelve months is distributed as expected. Standard group C is by definition involved in only one economic activity. In flexibility group A, 40% of respondents have two or more economic activities. Similarly, this group differs distinctively from both flexibility group B and, even more so, from standard group C, in terms of working more hours in all activities (i.e. the sum of hours worked in all activities); 41% of group A work more than fifty hours per week. In standard group C, 76% work the 'standard' working week (the group from 37 to 42 hours), while only 21% of flexible group A work those hours. For all three aspects of work characteristics in table 3 (number of activ-

³ One could argue that neither students nor pensioners must engage in an economic activity as far as their basic status is concerned, so their engagement in one or more economic activities is a voluntary decision.

Table 3. Work characteristics (%)

	Flexibility group A	Flexibility group B	Standard group C	n
<i>Number of activities in the last 12 months *</i>				
1	60	93	100	483
2	29	6		66
3	7	1		15
4	3			5
5	1			2
6	1			1
				572
<i>Hours of work in all activities *</i>				
Less than 36 hours	15	12	2	54
From 37 to 42	21	55	76	287
From 43 to 50	23	17	19	110
More than 50 hours	41	16	4	114
				565
<i>Working schedule *</i>				
Regular working hours: Monday morning to Friday afternoon	25	16	100	257
Shift work	12	51		124
Flexitime	30	3		59
Other regular schedule	6	7		25
Irregular, it varies	27	21		91
Not available	1			1
				557
<i>Type of contract in main activity *</i>				
No contract	9	7		29
Self-employed	22	2	2	45
Permanent contract	46	54	95	359
Reduced working-time contract	2	2	2	11
Fixed term	3	30		65
'On call', subject to requirements	2	2	1	9
With a temporary-work agency	8	1		15
On a fee-only basis	5	2	1	13
On a work experience project		1		1
Not available	2	2		7
				554
<i>Place of work</i>				
At home	8	6	1	28
Combined at home and elsewhere	11	2	2	26
Within the locality where you live	31	37	39	199
Commuting to a different locality	36	49	50	251
Abroad	1	1	2	6
Always changing	14	5	7	47
Other situation	1			1
				558

Significance level of chi-square tests: * 0.01. Source: Sicherl [2003: 53]

ities in the past twelve months, hours of work in all activities and working schedule) the percentage difference distribution among the three flexibility categories is statistically significant at the 0.01 significance level of chi-square tests. On the average, flexibility group A works in more activities, works more hours per week, and has a more flexible schedule than the other two groups. It also shows higher values in income distribution and household goods distribution.

The type of contract in the main activity also differs significantly among the three groups; it is quite uniform in standard group C and most diversified in flexibility group A. The prevailing type of contract in the main activity is a permanent contract, at about 65% of respondents. In the standard group C the percentage of permanent contracts is 95%,⁴ with 54% for flexibility group B and 46% for flexibility group A. However, the distinction between flexibility groups A and B is pronounced in the other categories of contract, self-employment being the most important in flexibility group A, and fixed-term employment in flexibility group B. The differences among the three categories with respect to the place of work are somewhat less pronounced; in all categories the majority commutes to work in a different locality.⁵

Testing the percentage distributions for the three flexibility groups by their personal characteristics and the respective social groups reveals significant differences for age group, social class and occupational status, but not for gender, education, type of settlement and family composition [Sicherl and Remec 2002: 37]. In all, 75% of standard group C belong to the age group 25–49 years, 67% of flexibility group B, and 54% of flexibility group A. Also, flexibility group A has the widest distribution over the different age groups, which is most likely a result of the inclusion in this group of students and retired people with one or more activities. This also indicates that some flexibility characteristics can be used productively at both ends of the age distribution.⁶ On the average, flexibility group A respondents belong to the middle and the upper middle classes, at 67% and 13% respectively. The greatest disparity is between flexibility group A and flexibility group B, for which the corresponding percentages are 52% and 3%, respectively, and of which 45% belong to the working class. If one uses the occupational status (ISCO 1 digit) as an approximation of social classes, the differences are statistically significant. Here, the distinction between flexibility group A and standard group C is not very pronounced, but between them and flexibility group B it is, as within the latter there is a heavy concentration of ISCO groups 5 and 8 (service workers, market sales workers and plant

⁴ Some small percentages for this group are a consequence of the fact that the variable on employment status that was used for classification purposes was a multi-response variable.

⁵ However, flexibility group A is also characterised by the widest distribution of other cases, and it has distinctly higher percentages in the elements 'working at home', 'combined at home and elsewhere' and 'always changing'.

⁶ Gender differences are not so pronounced and are not statistically significant. If we compare the distribution of men among the three categories, the percentage differences are not large. With respect to women the differences are larger, with an under-representation of women in flexibility group A.

Table 4. Different incomes of respondents by flexibility category (n=578)

	Flexibility group A	Flexibility group B	Standard group C
Wage or salary *	51.6%	82.8%	100%
Self-employed earnings *	17.6%	2.9%	
Income from additional jobs (can be occasional and/or casual work) *	34.0%	11.5%	2.2%
Income from own farming or agricultural production (including produce) *	9.0%	3.8%	
Pension *	13.3%	1.4%	0.6%
Unemployment benefit *	0.5%	3.8%	
Grant or scholarship for education and training, including loans *	9.6%		1.1%
Income from investments, savings or rents from properties *	6.4%	0.5%	1.7%
Profit from a business *	8.0%	1.0%	1.1%
Private transfers (e.g. alimony, or payment from others such as parents) *	9.6%	0.5%	0.6%
Other sources	9.0%	3.8%	3.3%
Other social transfers (e.g. child allowance, parental leave)	14.9%	12.4%	21.0%
None, the respondent had no income last month	0.5%	0.5%	

Significance level of chi-square tests: * 0.01. Source: Sicherl [2003: 27]

and machine operators). To sum up, age, social class, occupational status and education exhibit statistically significant differences for the three categories. Gender differences exist but are not very pronounced, and the urban/rural classification and family composition with respect to children are not significantly different among the three flexibility categories [ibid.].

When sources of income are cross-tabulated with the three flexibility categories, it can be observed that the situation differs considerably for each of them. The group 'full-time and regular schedule, one economic activity' is practically exclusively dependent on wages and salaries (100% of responses), with the addition of other social transfers which do not depend on the conditions of work but on social security circumstances. Flexible employment group B is substantially more diversified with respect to sources of income, but still very much concentrated in the wage or salary category (82.8% of responses). Flexible employment group A has a much higher incidence of different and additional income categories: wage and salary is reported by 51.6% of respondents, 34% of respondents report income from additional jobs, and there are also important categories of answers (self-employed earnings, with 17.6% of responses, and profit from a business, for 8.0% of respondents) which are practically negligible in the other two groups.

The differences with respect to satisfaction with the stability of work are statistically significant as shown in table 5. As expected, the dissatisfaction is much higher in flexibility category B, where temporary jobs and part-time jobs are also included, along with a pronounced share of ISCO categories 5 and 8. This is an indi-

Table 5. Satisfaction with various aspects of work (%)

	Flexibility group A	Flexibility group B	Standard group C	n
<i>General satisfaction with work *</i>				
Dissatisfied / very dissatisfied	8	12	3	44
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	20	23	19	117
Satisfied / very satisfied	72	65	78	397
				558
<i>Stability of work *</i>				
Dissatisfied / very dissatisfied	9	23	7	71
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	20	20	15	98
Satisfied / very satisfied	72	57	78	368
				537
<i>Duration of contract *</i>				
Dissatisfied / very dissatisfied	2	19	2	37
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	11	11	3	36
Satisfied / very satisfied	87	70	95	375
				448
<i>Hours of work *</i>				
Dissatisfied / very dissatisfied	18	17	10	83
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	24	13	18	99
Satisfied / very satisfied	59	70	72	373
				555
<i>Location of work</i>				
Dissatisfied / very dissatisfied	3	6	3	24
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	13	12	7	59
Satisfied / very satisfied	84	82	90	472
				555
<i>Earnings *</i>				
Dissatisfied / very dissatisfied	21	34	32	160
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	28	31	35	172
Satisfied / very satisfied	51	35	33	217
				549

Significance level of chi-square tests: * 0.01. Source: Sicherl [2003: 56]

rect confirmation of a plausible element for the distinction between flexibility categories A and B. The 'objective' elements for such a distinction are here confirmed by 'subjective' opinions on a person's satisfaction with this aspect of work. Similarly, the differences in respondents' satisfaction with the duration of the contract are statistically significant and again very pronounced in the percentage of dissatisfaction in flexibility group B.

Satisfaction with respect to hours of work is again statistically significant, but with the three flexibility categories in different positions. In this case, the least satisfaction is expressed in flexibility group A, which was earlier distinctly shown as working more hours. The reverse position is observed with respect to satisfaction with earnings, where differences are statistically significant, but where the level of satisfaction is distinctly higher in flexibility group A. Consequently, flexibility group A is more satisfied with respect to earnings and less satisfied with respect to hours of work than the other two categories. The differences with respect to location of work are not significant; the high percentage in the groups 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' (between 82% and 90%) is again rather surprising.

With respect to decisions about various aspects of work, there are again statistically significant differences between the groups: the freedom of decision-making about the number of hours of work, general working schedule, overtime and place of work is much larger for flexibility group A than for the other two groups [Sicherl and Remec 2002: 49].

The economic characteristics of the household of the respondents represent important additional information to that indicated the sections on work characteristics, personal characteristics and social groups. The differences in income distribution (by sextiles) are statistically significant and reveal that household income is the highest for flexibility group A and lowest for flexibility group B. A similar conclusion applies to personal income (by sextiles), and is also valid for the three categories of permanent household goods, where the differences between households are still important (second house or flat, internet access, personal computer). Both for income and for these durable goods the ranking is the same: flexible employment group A occupies the most favourable position, followed by standard group C, while flexible employment group B features the lowest average income and the lowest occurrence of the possession of these household goods [Sicherl and Remec 2002: 41, 23].

The analysis above shows that for practically all the analysed aspects of work characteristics, personal characteristics and social groups, satisfaction with various aspects of work, and decisions about various aspects of work, the differences between the three flexibility categories are statistically significant.⁷ Thus, in terms of

⁷ Among the important aspects for which the differences are not statistically significant, mention should be made of type of settlement (urban/rural) and family composition (defined as families with or without children aged 14 and less); the differences in gender and education are greater, but still not statistically significant in a comparison of the three aggregate flexibility categories.

work issues, the applied categorisation has no doubt proved to be quite relevant in bringing out the major differences among the three flexibility categories.

The next important stage of analysis is to examine the question of whether the applied categorisation also implies significantly different situations with respect to work/family conflicts, and whether such conflicts appear always, often, sometimes, rarely or never. There are two surprising findings in the analysis of this part of the questionnaire. First, a surprisingly high proportion of answers indicate that such conflicts never appear. Second, of the five aspects of possible work/family conflicts, only one – whether a person takes work home to finish – reveals significant differences between the three flexibility categories, while in the other four, the differences are not statistically significant. In addition, the same pattern is observed with respect to the degree of agreement about household finances, about allocation of household tasks, about time spent together and about time spent at work, which do not show any statistically significant differences between the three flexibility categories. Another set of subjective opinions in the survey was related to the personal perception of well-being. Four issues were addressed in the questions: how the respondent is satisfied with his/her way of life, and with the economic situation of the household, how he/she compares the economic household situation to that of five years ago, and what his/her expectations are about the economic household situation for the next year. First, with respect to the satisfaction with the way of life and the economic situation of the household, the differences between the three flexibility categories are not statistically significant. As in the earlier questions about the level of satisfaction, here, too, the level of satisfaction is rather high, and is higher with regard to the way of life than the economic situation of the household. Second, the differences are also not significant in the case of the comparison with the situation five years ago and the expectations for the next year. For both questions, the category 'stayed the same' contains the highest percentage of answers [Sicherl and Remec 2002: 40, 50, 51].

According to the answers in the survey, the three flexibility categories show very significant differences in ('objective') characteristics related to work and practically no significant differences in ('subjective') opinions about possible work/family conflicts or agreement on various household issues.

A comparative analysis of selected countries participating in the HWF project

In this section, some limited comparisons of selected countries participating in the HWF project will be provided, based both on the results of the HWF surveys as well as on some secondary sources, in order to include some general information about atypical forms and to provide some sensitivity analysis.

The countries in table 6 are ranked by the percentage value of respondents with full-time employment in categories 1, 2 and 8. An interesting observation is that two developed countries, Sweden and the United Kingdom, are placed below the HWF7 average, while all candidate countries, with the exception of Romania,

Table 6. Flexibility grouping into eight categories (%)

	HU	CZ	BG	SI	S	RO	UK	HWF7
1. Full-time employment, more activities, flexitime	10	19	7	14.6	11.7	11.1	10.5	12.1
2. Full-time employment, shift and irregular work	25.8	20.8	18.7	20.5	13.7	20.5	14.9	18.9
3. Part-time employment	4.9	2.6	5.8	1.1	17	5.8	23.8	8.8
4. Fixed contract	0.6	1.3	4.2	10.3	1.2	2.2	0.8	2.6
5. Self-employed	11.9	13.8	11.7	6.8	8.4	6.6	10.9	10.1
6. Students and retired with one or more activities	3.3	5	2.4	10.1	9.6	8.6	5.5	6.4
7. Others	3.5	3	4.8	4.4	1.7	17	1.1	5.1
8. Employed full-time, regular schedule, one activity	40	34.5	45.4	32.2	36.8	28.3	32.5	36
Employed full-time (1 + 2 + 8)	75.8	74.2	71	67.3	62.2	59.9	57.9	67
Flexibility group A (1+5+6)	25.2	37.7	21.1	31.5	29.7	26.3	26.9	28.6
Flexibility group B (2+3+4+7)	34.8	27.8	33.5	36.3	33.5	45.4	40.6	35.4
Standard employment group C (8)	40	34.5	45.4	32.2	36.8	28.3	32.5	36
n	658	1022	898	562	1119	830	631	5720

Source: Sicherl [2003: 65]

are above that average and show a greater number of people employed full-time. As a result, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands⁸ all have a higher level of development, a better employment situation and higher earnings, and yet at the same time have a higher share of atypical forms of employment, especially part-time work. Whereas the situation is of course very different in different countries, in the policy discussions it is many times wrongly assumed that atypical forms of employment are necessarily inferior to the standard forms of employment. In the cross-country comparison within the HWF project the very opposite is true for various reasons; the higher share of atypical forms of employment is associated with a better employment situation and greater work satisfaction.

There are several evident departures from the average structure of the chosen categories. As far as part-time employment is concerned, the United Kingdom and

⁸ The latter are not included in the table because of a different categorisation of data in the database.

Table 7. Average number of activities reported in the past twelve months (n = 5958)

	S	CZ	SI	HWF7	UK	RO	HU	BG
1. Full-time employment, more activities, flexitime	2.19	1.84	1.85	1.89	1.91	1.87	1.89	1.52
2. Full-time employment, shift and irregular work	1	1	1	0.98	1	1	1	0.9
3. Part-time employment	1.59	1.33	1.33	1.36	1.21	1.58	1.27	0.92
4. Fixed contract	2.38	1.46	1.12	1.15	0.83	1.05	1.4	0.82
5. Self-employed	1.48	1.33	1.15	1.28	1.26	1.43	1.14	1.05
6. Students and retired people with one or more activities	1.7	1.47	1.46	1.42	1.4	1.08	1.23	1.09
7. Others	1.58	1.56	1.03	1.08	0.73	1.13	0.63	1
8. Employed full-time, regular schedule, one activity	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Average	1.37	1.26	1.2	1.2	1.19	1.19	1.11	1.01
Flexibility group A	1.83	1.61	1.57	1.55	1.54	1.5	1.45	1.2
Flexibility group B	1.38	1.13	1.05	1.1	1.11	1.13	0.99	0.91
Standard employment group C	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1

Source: Sicherl [2003: 66]

Sweden obviously have a much higher share of this form of employment than the candidate countries. Romania has a very high share of 'others', which is generally the most disadvantaged category. Slovenia and Sweden have the highest share of 'students and retired people with one or more activities'; Slovenia also has a high share of fixed contracts. The highest proportion of standard employment group C is found in Hungary and Bulgaria.

One aspect of work flexibility relates to the average number of activities reported in the past twelve months.⁹ Although there are differences among countries, there is also a clear distinction between the selected categories. By definition, standard employment group C has only one activity. As the respondents with more activities have been shifted into category 1, category 2 also has only one activity.¹⁰ It is

⁹ In international comparisons the results refer to the age group 18–65 years inclusive. In the section on Slovenia the results encompass all respondents over age 18, which may lead to some differences in the respective figures for Slovenia between the two sections.

¹⁰ With the exception of Bulgaria, for which there may be some problems in the calculation drawn from the common database.

Table 8. Hours of work per week in the main activity for eight categories of flexibility (n = 4747)

	RO	SI	CZ	BG	HWF6	S	UK
1. Full-time employment, more activities, flexitime	44.7	43.8	43.3	38.9	42.8	42.2	42.3
2. Full-time employment, shift and irregular work	46.9	43.0	43.6	40.9	43.3	41.6	44.4
3. Part-time employment	31.5	22.8	26.2	33.5	26.4	28.6	19.5
4. Fixed contract	48.4	40.9	40.1	32.3	38.9	33.3	45.8
5. Self-employed	53.7	53.2	52.1	48.6	47.3	44.6	43.0
6. Students and retired people with one or more activities	38.7	28.7	18.9	30.5	27.0	21.6	21.9
7. Others	47.9	48.1	43.0	32.0	42.4	29.1	31.2
8. Employed full-time, regular schedule, one activity	42.4	41.9	41.3	40.0	41.3	41.9	40.8
Average	44.5	42.0	42.3	40.0	40.6	39.3	35.7
Flexibility group A	45.9	41.9	43.6	44.6	42.6	42.7	38.7
Flexibility group B	45.2	42.2	41.8	37.4	38.2	34.3	29.5
Standard employment group C	42.4	41.9	41.3	40.0	41.3	41.9	40.8

Source: Sicherl [2003: 75]

interesting that for category 1, which is the most important subgroup in flexibility group A, the average number of income activities (1.9 activity) is very similar throughout all the participating countries. This category is followed by category 6 (students and retired people with one or more activities) and category 3 (part-time employment). On the basis of the survey results Sweden is the most flexible participating country with respect to the average number of income activities in the last twelve months, followed by the Czech Republic, Slovenia, Great Britain and Romania.

Table 8 presents the hours of work per week in the main activity for eight categories of flexibility and shows that the differences for a given category between the countries are considerably smaller than the differences in the hours of work between different categories within a given country. The self-employed are those who work the longest hours in all the participating countries, with the exception of the United Kingdom. For standard employment group C the differences between the countries are small, with the average being 41 hours worked per week in the main activity, and with upward and downward variations of only one hour. Those who

Table 9. Hours of work per week in the main activity by gender (n = 4921)

	Men	Women	Average
RO	47.76	41.45	44.61
SI	44.03	39.23	41.83
CZ	43.84	39.15	41.69
BG	41.00	39.02	40.01
HWF7	43.00	35.94	39.55
S	41.67	36.54	39.25
UK	43.45	29.14	35.41
NL	40.45	26.16	33.55

Source: Sicherl [2003: 72]

work substantially fewer hours are students and retired people with one or more activities and those employed part-time.

In table 9 the differences in working hours per week are substantial and the grouping is also clear: overall working hours are higher in the candidate countries than in the three developed EU15 countries participating in the project. These differences are especially striking in the case of women in the UK and in the Netherlands. For all the countries (with the possible exception of Bulgaria), the number of working hours per week is statistically significantly higher for men than for women. We can conclude that the rather large differences in the average number of working hours per week between countries are to a great extent influenced by structural characteristics, i.e. the share of part-time employment for women and the proportion of students and retired people in income activities.

It is interesting to compare the categorisation of survey respondents by income activity presented in the above tables, which are based on the objective elements of the respondents' positions at work, with their responses regarding subjective satisfaction with various aspects of work in the main activity. Table 10 presents the weighted average of responses in the range from 1 (very unsatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied). These responses are of interest in two respects. On the one hand, a comparison between countries can be made of the results of the satisfaction with a given aspect of work, and on the other hand, a ranking of the six analysed aspects of work can be established with respect to the degree of satisfaction.

At first glance it is noticeable that the degree of the expressed satisfaction with work is high. The ranking of the participating countries is expected; the highest value is that of the Netherlands, followed by Sweden and the United Kingdom. The candidate countries show values of subjective general satisfaction with work that are below the average. With regard to subjective satisfaction with work in general

Table 10. Weighted average of responses with respect to the subjective satisfaction with various aspects of work in the main activity

How satisfied are you	NL	S	UK	HWF8	SI	BG	RO	HU	CZ
In general: and with the:	4.40	4.21	4.13	3.87	3.76	3.69	3.63	3.61	3.57
Duration of contract	4.64	4.53	4.45	4.11	3.90	3.71	3.77	4.09	3.84
Location of work	4.34	4.39	4.33	4.09	3.98	3.96	3.94	3.95	3.83
Stability of work	4.25	4.17	4.16	3.84	3.65	3.42	3.73		3.60
Hours of work	4.44	3.89	4.03	3.83	3.59	3.87	3.72	3.61	3.48
Earnings	3.85	3.23	3.48	3.08	3.06	2.77	2.63	2.73	2.96

Source: Sicherl [2003: 83]

among the candidate countries, it is surprising that Hungary and the Czech Republic show a slightly lower weighted average than Bulgaria and Romania.

In table 10 the countries are ordered horizontally by the value of the subjective satisfaction with work in general; while the other five aspects of work are ordered vertically in accordance with the average value of the HWF8 weighted average for the respective aspect. In the vertical direction, the respondents are on the average more satisfied with the duration of the contract and the location of work. The second area with a lower degree of satisfaction includes the stability of work and hours of work. In all countries the lowest degree of satisfaction expressed relates to earnings (the numerical value for HWF8 of 3.07 means approximately neither satisfied nor unsatisfied).

Comparisons based on secondary sources

The results of the HWF project surveys in the participating countries need to be supplemented by information from secondary sources about these countries and about their positions over time with respect to the level of development and the structure of the economy.

Table 11 is based on the statistical data presented in *Employment in Europe 2002* [European Commission 2002].¹¹ For the year 2001, the share of total employment represented by self-employment is very similar in all the HWF project coun-

¹¹ One should be aware that even within the EU the comparability of employment data among all the countries and over time is an acute problem, as noted in the European Commission [2000: 17].

Table 11. Summary table for the HWF project countries for 2001

Share of total employment in three atypical forms of employment								
	NL	S	UK	SI	CZ	HU	BG	RO
Self-employment as % of total employment	13.8	5	11.7	11.8	14.6	13.9	13.7	25.7
Part-time employment as % of total employment	42.2	24.1	24.9	6.1	4.3	3.3	3.4	16.8
Fixed-term contracts as % of total employment	14.3	13.5	6.8	10.8	6.9	6.4	5.7	1.6
Distribution of employment by sectors								
	NL	S	UK	SI	CZ	HU	BG	RO
Share of employment in services	76.7	74.1	73.7	51.4	54.6	59.4	57.6	29.7
Share of employment in industry	19.8	23.3	24.8	38.6	40.5	34.5	32.7	25.8
Share of employment in agriculture	3.4	2.6	1.4	9.9	4.9	6.1	9.7	44.4

Source: European Commission [2002]

tries and is close to the EU15 average; the only two outliers are Romania on the high end and Sweden on the low end. The case of Romania can be easily explained by the high share agriculture represents out of total employment; the low value for Sweden is an interesting case for a more detailed inquiry.

The share of total employment represented by part-time employment is a different case. The Netherlands stands out with 42.2% of total employment made up of part-time employment, followed by the UK with 24.9% and Sweden with 24.1%. Even for the latter two countries the share of part-time work is more than four times higher than for the candidate countries (excluding the outlier Romania). In this category the most important differences between the group of developed and the group of candidate countries in the HWF project are established. First, the gap between the two groups is the largest at this point. Second, for the developed countries this is the largest category of atypical employment, while for the candidate countries it is the smallest. Third, in the group of developed countries the gender divide is very large, while in the candidate countries it is not yet of any important magnitude. The proportion of fixed-term contracts is highest in the Netherlands, Sweden and Slovenia; in all these countries there has been a markedly increasing trend during the past decade.

While international cross-section comparisons are not to be directly converted into policy conclusions [Sicherl 2002], the analysis presented here is nonetheless an additional warning that one should not set out from the assumption, explicit or implicit, that atypical jobs are necessarily substandard jobs, and consequently jump to the conclusion that the work situation in the three EU developed countries is in-

ferior to that of the participating candidate countries because in the former the share of atypical forms of employment is so much higher. First, in the EU15 in 2000, 59.3% of those employed part-time did not want a full-time job, and among women alone the percentage was 65.1% (the percentage of women reached as high as 80.2% in the UK, 79.3% in Germany, and 77.8% in the Netherlands, while it was 52.3% in Sweden). In the EU15 only 15.8% answered that the reason for working part-time was that they could not find a full-time job. Second, in the section on self-reported job satisfaction, in 1998 the category of very satisfied voluntary part-time employment exceeded 60% of respondents in the EU15, while for involuntary part-time employment it was around 30% [European Commission 2002]. Third, all three countries have a much higher activity rate than the candidate countries, which during the transition depression have fallen from their earlier, rather high levels, comparable to those in developed countries, and consequently their employment positions have substantially deteriorated. Fourth, the wage level is much higher in the participating EU countries. Fifth, the unemployment rate as a percentage of the labour force aged 15+ is lower in these three countries than in the candidate countries and is especially low in the Netherlands [ibid]. In sum, this study provides abundant evidence that the indiscriminate application of the assumption that atypical jobs are inferior jobs is not warranted.

As elaborated elsewhere [Sicerl 2002], there is also a very substantial gap between the three developed countries and the candidate countries in the distribution of civilian employment by sectors of activity. The share of employment in services, which can be an important factor influencing the share of atypical forms of employment, reveals substantial differences also among the developed countries. In terms of high shares of employment in the services sector, the leading developed countries among those studied are the USA and the Netherlands. Close behind them are Sweden, the UK and France, while countries such as Germany, Italy and Japan have a distinctly lower share of civilian employment engaged in services [Kalleberg 2002]. The candidate countries still have lower values for the percentages engaged in this sector, mainly because of the large share of industry, and in Romania especially because of the large share of agriculture. The EU group of HWF project countries is at the top in an international perspective in terms of the importance of the service sector, and the candidate countries are suffering from a temporal lag in this respect, even more so than in the case of GDP per capita. In addition to lagging behind on the general level of economic development, the candidate countries are the type of countries which, owing to the emphasis that has been put on industry, have made relatively less of an advance in developing services. The importance of these two factors is discussed below.

A brief comparison of the results for the Czech Republic and Slovenia

First of all, there are several differences and similarities between the Czech Republic and Slovenia as far as background factors are concerned. In terms of population, the Czech Republic is about five times larger than Slovenia. In terms of GDP per capita at purchasing power parity, in 2001 the value for Slovenia amounted to 69% of the average for the EU15, and the corresponding figure for the Czech Republic was 57%. Within the range of countries participating in the HWF project, Slovenia and the Czech Republic, together with Hungary, form the second group according to level of development, while the EU15 countries feature considerably higher values. Both the level of development and the sectoral structure of employment have an important influence on the share of atypical forms of employment that exist.

With respect to these variables the Czech Republic and Slovenia are reasonably close together. The differences between them and their differences from the EU15 average can be expressed in two ways. According to Eurostat,¹² in 2001 the level of GDP per capita (at purchasing power parity) in relation to the EU15 average amounted to 112% in the case of the Netherlands, 100% for Sweden and the UK, 69% for Slovenia, 57% for the Czech Republic, 51% for Hungary, 28% for Bulgaria, and 25% for Romania. In addition to the static measures of disparity usually used and indicated above, degrees of disparity can also be measured in a temporal perspective. Time distance generally means the difference between the points in time when two events occurred. A special category of time distance can be defined that relates to the level of the indicator being analysed. The suggested statistical measure, S-distance,¹³ measures the time distance (proximity) between the points in time when the two compared series reach the specified level of indicator X. The logic in the calculation of the retrospective (ex post) S-distance can be observed if in the historical time series for the EU15 one looks for the year in which the EU15 had the same per-

¹² For the EU15 time series of GDP per capita in constant prices see the European Commission [2001b], for candidate countries see Eurostat [2002]. For an explanation of the derivation see Sicherl [2002: 14–17].

¹³ The operational statistical measure of the time distance concept is a special category of time distances S-distance: for a given level of X_L , $X_L = X_i(t_i) = X_j(t_j)$ the time separating unit (i) and unit (j) is $S_{ij}(X_L) = DT(X_L) = T_i(X_L) - T_j(X_L)$. See e.g. Sicherl [1997]. Several other papers of the author of the time distance concept of measuring differences between time series can be found at <http://www.sicenter.si/td.html>. They provide more details on time distance methodology with empirical application to a range of problems. S-distance as a generic concept can be generalised to other types of applications – the analysis of the discrepancy between the estimated and actual values and goodness-of-fit in time series, regressions and models, forecasting and monitoring, etc. – and extended to variables other than time. The S-distance measure is a new view of the information, using levels of the variable(s) as identifiers and time as the focus of comparison and numeraire. It is theoretically universal, intuitively understandable and can be usefully applied to a wide variety of substantive fields as an important analytical and presentational tool.

centage (69%) of its 2001 value of GDP per capita as Slovenia had in 2001. This was approximately in the year 1983, which means that the retrospective time distance is about 18 years. In other words, the same value of the analysed indicator was achieved in the EU15 18 years ago (1983 compared to 2001 in Slovenia). The corresponding values are 29 years for the Czech Republic and 32 years for Hungary [Sicerl 2003: 132–136].

Another important structural difference is the share of employment in services out of total civilian employment. OECD data enable an analysis of the long-term trends for this indicator. In 1999, the highest values were around 75% in the Netherlands and the USA [OECD 2001]. The values for the two OECD countries among the candidate countries in the HWF project, Hungary with 58.4% and the Czech Republic with 47.1%, were approximately in the range of values for 2000 for Slovenia 52.7% and Bulgaria 54%, while Romania with 29% was much behind [European Commission 2001a]. Among the candidate countries the highest value in 1999 was that of Hungary, a value that had already been achieved in the Netherlands back in 1974, i.e. 25 years earlier [Sicerl 2002: 9]; the time lags for Slovenia and the Czech Republic are even larger. The conclusion is obvious: both the conventional static measure of disparity and time distance should be analysed simultaneously in order to arrive at a more realistic evaluation of the situation. In the dynamic world of today it is by no means satisfactory to rely only on the static measures of disparity.

The direct reflection of this main structural difference between the two groups of analysed countries is the relative importance industry occupies in total employment. Slovenia and the Czech Republic, as the most industrialised countries among the HWF candidate countries, feature the values that Sweden and the Netherlands were experiencing three decades ago and the UK two decades ago. In the future, these time distances can be shortened, but at present the differences are still large [Sicerl 2002: 11].

With respect to the results of the HWF survey, the Czech Republic and Slovenia feature the highest representation of flexibility group A from among the compared countries, and especially the highest proportions of respondents in category 1, i.e. full-time employment, more activities, flexitime. The share of self-employed is higher in the Czech Republic, while the share of students and retired people with one or more activities is higher in Slovenia. Standard employment group C represents about one-third in both countries, similar to the proportion in the UK and lower than the HWF7 average.

In reference to the average number of activities reported in the past twelve months, the numbers are very similar, except for two groups – the self-employed and fixed contracts – where the Czech Republic shows more activities. The most flexible country in this respect is Sweden, followed by the Czech Republic and Slovenia. The average number of hours of work per week in the main activity is very similar in the two compared countries and is considerably higher than in the other participating countries, especially in the case of women. Both the Czech Republic and Slovenia follow the general pattern that the number of weekly hours of work in

the main activity is significantly higher for men than for women. The hours of work for each of the eight categories are very similar, except that students and retired people with one or more activities work longer hours in Slovenia.

The weighted average of responses relating to the subjective satisfaction with various aspects of work in the main activity presented in table 10 indicates somewhat different results. The satisfaction with work in general is, according to the responses in the HWF survey, higher in Slovenia than in the Czech Republic. The value for the Czech Republic is the lowest of all eight participating countries. With regard to the other five aspects of work that were analysed, the subjective satisfaction in Slovenia also reveals higher values than in the Czech Republic.

One interesting point regarding potential flexibility is the readiness to accept certain conditions if, in the case of unemployment, it would be necessary to do so to get a better job. In the survey there were three possible answers to this question: 'yes', 'maybe', 'no'. In the case of the condition that a person retrain into another profession the percentage of affirmative answers was higher in the Czech Republic, while for the other four conditions (to work more than 40 hours per week, to learn a new foreign language, to move to another location, to accept less attractive work conditions) the percentage of affirmative answers is higher in Slovenia. If one were to take as one of the measures of flexibility the average percentage of negative answers to the five conditions for employment in a hypothetical case of unemployment, then Slovenia would come out as the most flexible country. The average percentage of negative answers amounts in Slovenia to only 27%; in the United Kingdom and Bulgaria the figure is 34%, in the Czech Republic 36%, in Hungary 46% and in the Netherlands 48% [Sicherl 2003: 90–91].

Comparing the weighted average of responses concerning the general satisfaction with the way of life and with the economic situation of the household, a very remarkable difference surfaces. The ranking of the participating eight countries according to the economic situation of the household is very much in line with the values of GDP per capita discussed above (only Romania and Bulgaria reverse their positions). The differences in this weighted average are statistically significant, except between Sweden and the United Kingdom. However, the weighted average of the subjective satisfaction with the way of life shows strikingly different results. The highest subjective satisfaction expressed is in the Netherlands, followed by Sweden, as expected. The values for the United Kingdom, Slovenia, and the Czech Republic are rather similar, and the differences for the expressed satisfaction with the way of life are not statistically significant [Sicherl 2003: 91–94].

Conclusion

The issue of flexible employment and the optimal balance between flexibility and security is one of major economic, social and political importance. It is a very complex problem and will be subjected to continuous adjustments to changing situa-

tions and preferences.¹⁴ The viewpoint is that this very important issue of whether atypical jobs are good or bad jobs is to be investigated as an empirical issue.¹⁵

The detailed analysis of the Slovenian HWF survey case study confirms that atypical jobs are not necessarily bad jobs. Moreover, there is considerable heterogeneity in the work conditions, and, ultimately, in terms of income, flexibility, and freedom of decision-making, even in the category of full employment and permanent jobs. The survey respondents in Slovenia were first grouped into eight categories and then tentatively aggregated into three major categories: flexible employment group A, flexible employment group B and standard employment group C. Standard employment group C comprises those employed permanently full-time with a regular working schedule and only one economic activity. The respondents with some 'positive' aspects of flexibility belong to flexibility group A: on the average they work in more activities, more hours per week, have a more flexible schedule than the other two groups, have greater freedom of decisions about various aspects of work, and show higher values in income distribution and in household goods distribution. Flexible group B combines those respondents who show some 'negative objective' elements in their employment. In selected aspects some of the flexible jobs are better than the jobs in the standard employment group and some of them are worse. According to the survey for Slovenia, the three flexibility categories show very significant statistical differences in ('objective') characteristics related to work and practically no significant differences in ('subjective') opinions on possible work/family conflicts or agreement about various household issues. With respect to the former issues, the applied categorisation has no doubt proved to be extremely relevant in bringing out the major differences between the three flexibility categories.

In international comparisons there are many general factors, such as the level of development, the structure of the economy, technological progress, lifestyles and preferences, which indicate that the share of atypical or standard forms of employment is not influenced only by institutional and policy choices that result in different regulatory instruments. In the article it was shown that a higher level of development and a higher share of employment in services could facilitate the introduction of part-time employment. Smaller hours worked at higher wage levels may mean the same or even higher real income than full-time employment does in a candidate country. The insufficient level of income earned as well as the smaller share of services may mean that part-time employment, which may be one of the instruments for lowering unemployment rates, will not be increasing in the candidate countries as fast as it has in the participating EU countries in the HWF project.

¹⁴ There are many aspects of flexibility, the broadest subdivision probably being the flexibility concerns of enterprises and the flexibility concerns of households. For the HWF study the latter are more important, although the actual implementation of policies and the realisation of intentions on both sides happens only in an interaction between the labour and production markets.

¹⁵ McGovern, Smeaton and Hill [2002] analysed the situation in Britain in this manner; Kalleberg, Reskin and Hudson [2000] did so for the USA.

While more flexible labour market regulations may be needed, it is important to recognise that these alone do not determine the degree of labour market flexibility, which is also influenced by the behaviour of the labour market agents in the process of adjustment to new conditions. While Slovenia, for example, has rather rigid labour market regulation, in the study, the Slovenian respondents demonstrated the lowest average percentage of refusals to accept various conditions for employment in the case of unemployment. Labour market flexibility is obviously a multidimensional phenomenon and re-regulation rather than complete deregulation is the preferred option.

The brief comparison of the Czech Republic and Slovenia indicated that they have the highest share of flexibility group A among the participating countries, very similar hours of work, the highest share of employment in industry, and a very large time distance in the lag behind the developed countries with regard to the share of employment in services. It seems that individuals have been much more flexible in their adjustment to the new situation than the two countries have in executing the necessary structural adjustments. Satisfaction with various aspects of work, GDP per capita and possession of household goods are higher in Slovenia than in the Czech Republic; however, the weighted average of satisfaction with the way of life shows no statistically significant differences between the United Kingdom, Slovenia and the Czech Republic.

It is important to reiterate that, from the perspective of the 'supply side', empirical results indicate that atypical forms of employment can be both superior and inferior to the standard pattern of full-time employment. These forms are here to stay, as in many cases they enable people to deal with some household and/or enterprise problems. The important issue is to arrive at a social consensus about how to balance the benefits and costs of various forms of work flexibility for all stakeholders so that, together with other aspects and instruments of flexibility, they will serve as an important means of addressing the coming challenges and risks. An empirical analysis of these and other aspects of flexibility is required in order to provide input into this process.

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